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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9935

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1645

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001714

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/GAVITO/YERGER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/31/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PARM SY IS LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI BLOC WOULD ACCEPT PATRIARCH'S
SHORT-LIST FOR PRESIDENCY

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Classified By: DCM William Grant for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Parliamentary majority leader Saad Hariri's cousin and Chief of Staff Nader recently delivered assurances on behalf of Saad to the Patriarch that his bloc would vote for any candidate selected by the Patriarch in order to avoid a presidential vacuum. Nader was skeptical, however, whether Speaker Berri would do the same. If the Patriarch does produce a short-list, Nader believed Saad and Berri would first need to agree on one candidate before allowing parliament to vote. Nader further said the Patriarch continues to rejects a constitutional amendment to allow the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Michel Sleiman to run for president. Nader was critical of Michel Aoun's recent statements, and said he believed some Aoun MPs would buck their leader and go to parliament to vote to avoid a presidential vacuum. End summary.

¶2. (C) During a October 29 meeting with Pol/Econ Chief and Senior FSN Political Advisor, Nader Hariri, cousin and Chief of Staff of Future Movement leader and MP Saad Hariri, said he had recently met with Sfeir to deliver a message on Saad's behalf that his bloc would accept any short list of names proposed by the Patriarch. However, Nader did not believe that Speaker Berri would be able to give similar assurances to the Patriarch, despite Berri's repeated statements that he also would accept the Patriarch's candidates. Nader said Sfeir wanted guarantees that the names he would propose as potential candidates would not be rejected by either Saad or Berri; the Patriarch does not want to be "humiliated" or undermined and therefore is reluctant to put names forward.

¶3. (C) Should the Patriarch come up with a short list, Nader said, both Hariri and Berri would have to agree on one candidate before parliament actually votes. He cited Demianos Kattar, Fares Bouiez, Chaqib Qortbawi, Joseph Torbey and Simon Karam as names rumored to be on the list. If that were the case, Saad's bloc would vote for Karam, Nader said, since Karam shares the same independent and sovereign aspirations as March 14.

¶4. (C) Nader said Sfeir still opposes a constitutional amendment to allow LAF commander Michel Sleiman to become

president, as well as the election of a president elected by absolute majority. However, he spoke positively about Sleiman, saying that following the February 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, the General paid a condolence call on the Hariri family and informed them he was submitting his resignation (which was refused), a noble gesture in the eyes of the Hariri family.

NO DEAL OVER UNSCR 1559

15. (C) Responding to our inquiry regarding the ongoing one-on-one meetings between Hariri and Berri, Nader denied that controversial issues such as UNSCR 1559 had been discussed. Berri is attempting to dismiss 1559, he acknowledged, but the matter is not in his hands. "Berri cannot decide on his own on this particular issue, because this is an international resolution that Lebanon should respect," Nader added.

CRITICAL OF AOUN, BUT CONFIDENT AOUN MPS WILL SUPPORT NON-AOUN CANDIDATE

16. (SBU) Turning to General Michel Aoun, Nader criticized the General's recent radical statement, but disclosed that Aoun and Saad Hariri would meet soon. (Note: the meeting occurred October 31 in Paris, after neither side was willing to meet the other on his home turf back in Beirut. End note.) Nader believed Aoun's harsh statement could be related to news reports that one of his financial backers, Wadih Abssi, had lost the contract to build the U.S. Embassy in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, because of his financial support to Aoun. "Aoun gets crazy when the matter relates to his financial situation," Nader observed.

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17. (SBU) Nader also disclosed that he had been in contact with MPs from Aoun's bloc (Farid Khazen, Ghassan Moukheiber and Salim Salhab), and he sensed from the three that they would not go all the way with Aoun; when the time comes to avoid a presidential vacuum, they will make sure to attend the parliamentary session. Nader also indicated that some of Aoun's MPs will attend the session if they feel that the proposed candidate does not constitute a major challenge for them.

Comment

18. (SBU) Nader Hariri is close to his cousin Saad and has been his advisor since the 2005 assassination of Saad's father and Nader's uncle, former PM Rafiq Hariri. Though he does not speak as authoritatively as Saad's older advisors such as Ghattas Khoury, he has Saad's confidence, as demonstrated by the fact that Saad dispatched him to meet with the Patriarch. End comment.

FELTMAN